



Rep. Phil Dyer

1997 Session Report



Rep. Brian Thomas

Spring 1997

Dear neighbors,

Everyone seems to agree that the 1997 legislative session was a tremendous success. It was a landmark session, and for the first time in 40 years, we completed our work on time. That hasn't happened in a budget-writing year since 1957.

More importantly, we adopted historical policy changes, including juvenile justice reform, welfare reform and property tax relief. The defenders of big government said we couldn't get it done, but we have. The success of the Republican majority is attributable to our dedication to better government, safer communities and a stronger economy.

This report highlights our accomplishments as measured by the commitments that we made and how we've fulfilled them through the meaningful reforms that we've enacted. We hope it gives you a clear picture of the new course we have charted for state government since Republicans were elected to a majority in 1995.

Our thanks to those of you who have communicated to us during the session. Your comments and suggestions are always appreciated. And to each of you, it is an honor to serve as your representatives.

Sincerely,

Rep. Phil Dyer

Rep. Brian Thomas

The 1997 Legislature

What the media said:

"Rousing success for Legislature"

— Everett Herald, 4/28/97

"GOP triumph in Legislature"

— Everett Herald, 4/28/97

"Bipartisan effort defies predictions of gridlock"

— The News Tribune, 4/28/97

"A legislative session to write home about"

— Seattle Times 4/29/97

"An action-packed, productive legislative session"

— The News Tribune, 4/28/97

Call us if you need help

One of our jobs as your state representative is to help you when you have a problem with state government. If you need assistance in dealing with a state agency, feel free to contact one of us.

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Here's what we said . . .

Here's what we did . . .

The measure of our success in the Legislature is our willingness to keep our word. Following are the written commitments made by Republicans to the people of Washington followed by the result of our three-year effort.

We said we would get tough on crime . . .

We adopted major reforms to our failed juvenile justice system. A study of crime in King County showed a vast majority of serious violent crimes in our communities is being committed by 15- to 17-year-olds. It's no coincidence that our juvenile justice system was the one area of our criminal law that had yet to undergo needed reform.

The 1997 Juvenile Justice Act will restore respect for the law and keep young, nonviolent offenders on the right track, while making sure serious violent offenders are off the streets so our neighborhoods can remain safe.

In previous sessions, we adopted tougher penalties for armed crime committed by adults. The "Hard Time for Armed Crime" initiative passed in 1995 has increased prison sentences for any crime committed with a firearm. Coupled with the voter-approved "Three Strikes You're Out" initiative, violent crime in our state is declining.

We said we would bring tax relief to property owners . . .

We have placed control over rising property taxes back in the hands of the taxpayers. We have yet to get a governor to join our pledge to provide permanent tax relief, so we've done the next best thing . . . we've placed a meaningful property tax reduction package on the ballot in November.

If approved by the voters, the measure would permanently extend a 4.7 percent cut in the state tax levy that we adopted in 1996. More importantly it would get a handle on escalating property taxes by limiting future increases to the rate of inflation or 6 percent, whichever is lower. This plan will provide meaningful, fair property tax relief to all property owners, and help ensure that anyone who works and saves to own a home will not lose it because they can't afford the excessive property taxes.

We said we would generate family-wage jobs through tax reforms . . .

We have overhauled many of the regressive elements of our state's tax structure, and we've achieved almost immediate dividends in the way of new jobs. We have removed many of the regulatory obstacles that made Washington one of the worst places to do business compared to competing Western states.

We have generated thousands of new jobs in Washington as a direct result of our new tax and government reform policies. The results of this effort include jobs at the new Intel plant in DuPont, expansion of the Boeing workforce, a BHP Steel manufacturing plant in Kalama, and a Taiwan Semiconductor plant in Vancouver, just to name a few. In each of these cases, employers have cited our changing tax policy as a compelling reason for their decisions to locate or expand their businesses in our state.

We said we would protect your health-care choices . .

Under our reform of the government-run health-care plan initially set forth by the Lowry administration, we are now providing health care for more than 200,000 low-income families each biennium. This session we rescued the Health Services Account, which was facing a \$165 million deficit, without reducing the health-care benefits provided to the families served by the Basic health Plan. In addition to preserving the health-care coverage for these low-income families, we've increased the annual enrollment in the Basic Health Plan by 8,000 people.

We said we would fix the broken welfare system . . .

We have brought an end to the failed welfare policy that has trapped families in a cycle of government dependency for the last 60 years.

The Personal Responsibility Act of 1997 will encourage independence and lead recipients to self-sufficiency. It will require every able-bodied recipient to work or seek job training in order to be eligible for benefits. It places a five-year lifetime limit on benefits, and provides funding for child care and other essential benefits that are necessary for individuals to get back on their feet.

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We said we would reduce government regulations . . .

In 1995 we placed limits on the authority of regulatory agencies to adopt new rules and regulations. This session, we adopted legislation designed to help us get a handle on the unmanageable array of rules and regulations that are already in existence. There are nearly 20,000 pages of agency rules and regulations, with no policy in place for eliminating rules that become outdated or no longer necessary.

The result is a stifling regulatory environment in Washington that carries enormous costs for employers and property owners. Our legislation would have required that each rule is periodically reviewed and justified on the basis of relevance and fairness. If it doesn't pass the test, it comes off the books. Unfortunately, the governor vetoed some of this legislation.

We said we would improve education . . .

Our reforms to education are aimed at guaranteeing that every student who graduates from our schools can read, write and perform basic skills in science and math.

By reminding ourselves that schools exist to teach our kids, we have developed meaningful education reforms that will ensure every student learns to read by the third grade. We've also directed more money to the classrooms for learning materials and technology and have given local schools more authority to maintain excellence and discipline.

Historic welfare reform measure signed into law

The Legislature passed a landmark bill that will reform the state's 60-year-old welfare system. This measure will emphasize personal responsibility and reward work. The jointly sponsored proposal, House-Senate Bill 3901, was signed into law by Locke after lengthy negotiations between his office and legislative leaders. The bill includes the following components:

Time limits: Welfare recipients will receive benefits up to 60 months in a lifetime. Extensions will apply for the disabled, extreme hardship cases or victims of domestic violence.

Required work activities: From the time they enter the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, all adult welfare recipients will be required to take part in the Washington Work First Program. They will first be required to search for a job. If they cannot find one, they will have to participate in subsidized or nonsubsidized work, on-the-job training, vocational education or community service.

Child care: TANF recipients and low-income wage earners will be able to receive child-care assistance. A \$10 co-pay will be required for most recipients.

Juvenile justice system to be revamped

House and Senate lawmakers unanimously passed a measure that will reform the state's outdated and flawed juvenile justice system formed in 1977.

House-Senate Bill 3900 will ensure that older juvenile offenders will face some type of punishment for their crime, starting with the first offense.

Under the bill, 16- and 17-year-olds automatically will go to the adult court system if they are accused of drive-by shootings, first-degree robbery, first-degree child rape, first-degree burglary with a previous conviction, or any crime in which the offender was armed with a firearm. Currently, offenders ages 16 and 17 who commit murder and rape, or who are chronic and violent offenders, automatically are sent to the adult court system.

Issaquah Hatchery included in capital budget

The new two-year capital budget includes \$3 million in funding for the second stage of major renovations at the Issaquah Salmon Hatchery. We've worked for years to secure more money for the popular hatchery, so we're pleased with this news.

The capital budget also fully funds all locally approved school construction projects.

Here is a list of important bills, divided by issue, that were addressed by lawmakers. Most of these measures passed the Legislature and were acted upon the governor.

K-12 education

HB 1303 - Would allow school boards to grant waivers from state laws and rules to schools which have collaboratively developed a proposal to improve student learning or better meet the needs of students in their individual school. This flexibility would challenge the one-size-fits-all mentality and free schools to find a better way to improve student achievement in their school. The bill was approved by the Legislature but partially vetoed by the governor.

HB 1581 - Will improve safety for students and teachers by making it easier to keep violent, disruptive students, gang members, and juvenile sex offenders out of schools. Signed by the governor.

HB 2042 - Under this reading measure, school districts will be required to choose a reading-skill evaluation test from a list provided by the superintendent of public instruction and to administer it to all second graders by the 1998-99 school year. Students not reading at grade level will be given extra help. It will also establish a grant program to provide teachers professional development in teaching reading and to provide effective models for use statewide. Signed into law.

Higher education

HB 1372 - Will establish a prepaid tuition payment program to help make higher education affordable and accessible to all Washingtonians. This program will allow family members to buy tuition units for their children or other relatives at today's prices. These units could be purchased in small quantities over the years before a youngster is ready for college. Signed into law.

Transportation

The 1997-99 transportation budget includes funding for several highway projects in the 5th District, including some on Interstate 90, Highway 18, Highway 169, Highway 202 and Highway 516. While we were disappointed that the budget doesn't include funding for future long-term projects, we were pleased that it provides money for current projects in our district.

Health care

HB 1850 - Prime-sponsored by Rep. Dyer, it would have helped create a high-quality long-term care system that provides greater consumer protections and certain facility

standards. However, several key sections of the measure were vetoed by the governor.

SB 5127 - Will allow money to be raised for hospitals to provide trauma care. Under the measure, a \$5 surcharge on all moving violations and a \$6.50 fee on car sales will be imposed to raise \$11.5 million a year for the statewide trauma-care fund. The money will be used to reimburse hospitals, doctors and ambulance companies that provide emergency surgery and other medical treatment to uninsured and underinsured patients with life-threatening injuries. Signed into law.

Environment

HB 2096 - Will consolidate all oil spill prevention, planning and response activities of the Office of Marine Safety and Department of Ecology into one division within DOE. It contains strong intent language that restates the commitment to prevention and response. Signed into law.

Reforming state regulations

HB 1032 - This regulatory reform measure focused on the problems of rules which already are in existence. It also tried to reinstate some of the provisions of last year's regulatory reform bill that were vetoed by then-Gov. Lowry. HB 1032 would have required state agencies to review all existing state rules and regulations and tighten the process for adopting new rules. However, Locke excluded DSHS from this requirement. Locke vetoed several key sections, including one in which all existing rules and regulations would have to be reviewed in the next seven years, and those that are duplicative, unnecessary or outdated would have been eliminated.

Growth management

SB 6094 - This measure aimed to change provisions of the Growth Management Act (GMA). It reflects recommendations made by the Land Use Study Commission on growth management. The bill addresses several issues, including rural issues, open space corridors and agricultural zoning. It would require six Western Washington counties (including King County) to establish a monitoring and evaluation program to determine whether the countywide planning policies are meeting planned residential densities and uses. The evaluation must be conducted every five years. The governor vetoed several sections of the bill, including one that would allow growth in rural sections of less populated counties.

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1997-99 operating budget approved

The two-year budget is \$19.073 billion, \$112 million below the limit set by Initiative 601. This budget represents a 7.7 percent increase over the previous biennium, which is the smallest biennial increase since 1971. The two-year spending plan leaves the state with a responsible reserve fund of \$362 million. Several important areas are funded by the budget. Here is a summary of how the budget will be spent:

K-12 education: The budget provides \$8.9 billion for our public schools — a 7.1 percent spending increase over the previous budget. This includes a salary increase of 3 percent above the normal longevity increases for teachers. We've also included a 3 percent increase for other education employees, and \$20 million for instruction materials, including books, classroom supplies and software. This amounts to \$458 per average-size classroom.

Higher education: About \$2.2 billion is earmarked for our state's colleges and universities. This funding does not include money in the 1997-99 capital budget for construction and repair projects on our higher education campuses. The goal of greater access was addressed, as the budget provides an additional 6,390 enrollment slots, including 4,200 slots for our community and technical college system. There also is nearly \$34 million provided for financial aid programs. College faculty and staff will



Rep. Thomas makes a point to his colleagues on the floor of the House.

receive a 3 percent raise, and there is \$4 million in funding for the faculty retention pool, which will allow higher education institutions to keep their best faculty.

Basic Health Plan: The budget provides an additional 8,000 slots to the BHP, which provides subsidized health care for low-income families.

Tax reductions achieved

We kept our word of lowering taxes this year, as the Legislature approved \$411 million in tax cuts — with relief aimed at property taxpayers, senior citizens and small businesses.

The Legislature and Gov. Locke approved a bill, prime-sponsored by Rep. Thomas, that provides a one-year extension of the 4.7 percent reduction in the state property tax levy that was enacted in 1995. However, when lawmakers tried to pass a comprehensive and long-term property tax relief and reform package, the governor chose to veto our proposal. As a result, the Legislature sent the tax relief package to the ballot as a referendum, allowing Washington voters to have the final say in November. Under this comprehensive package, crafted by Rep. Thomas who is chairman of the House Finance Committee, the owner of a \$110,000 home would save about \$50

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Rep. Dyer listens to testimony during a meeting of the House Health Care Committee.

next year, as much as \$540 over the next five years, and up to \$23,000 over the life of a 30-year mortgage.

The Legislature voted overwhelmingly to complete the repeal of the business and occupation tax increase imposed in 1993. That tax hike targeted selected businesses, with increases of up to 66 percent placing a huge burden on many small employers. After the governor vetoed our first bill that would have begun the repeal this year, he agreed to sign a similar measure that will begin implementation of the repeal in 1998.

Late in the session, lawmakers passed a bill to bar property taxes on business intangibles. SB 5286 later was signed into law. The exemptions include such things as goodwill, trademarks, trade names, brand names, patents, copyrights, franchise agreements, trade secrets, noncompete agreements, customer lists and patient lists.



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